

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE****Patent and Trademark Office**

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JH

APPLICATION NO.	FILING DATE	FIRST NAMED INVENTOR	ATTORNEY DOCKET NO.
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09/681,166 02/07/01 MELOTIK

J 200-0729

010534
BLISS MCGLYNN, P.C.
2075 WEST BIG BEAVER ROAD
SUITE 600
TROY MI 48084

PM82/1018

 EXAMINER

GIUTMAN, H

ART UNIT	PAPER NUMBER
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3612

DATE MAILED:

10/18/01

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks

Office Action Summary

Application No. 09/681,166	Applicant(s) Melotik et al.
Examiner Hillary Gutman	Art Unit 3612

— The MAILING DATE of this communication appears on the cover sheet with the correspondence address —

Period for Reply

A SHORTENED STATUTORY PERIOD FOR REPLY IS SET TO EXPIRE 3 MONTH(S) FROM THE MAILING DATE OF THIS COMMUNICATION.

- Extensions of time may be available under the provisions of 37 CFR 1.136 (a). In no event, however, may a reply be timely filed after SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- If the period for reply specified above is less than thirty (30) days, a reply within the statutory minimum of thirty (30) days will be considered timely.
- If NO period for reply is specified above, the maximum statutory period will apply and will expire SIX (6) MONTHS from the mailing date of this communication.
- Failure to reply within the set or extended period for reply will, by statute, cause the application to become ABANDONED (35 U.S.C. § 133).
- Any reply received by the Office later than three months after the mailing date of this communication, even if timely filed, may reduce any earned patent term adjustment. See 37 CFR 1.704(b).

Status

1) Responsive to communication(s) filed on Sep 24, 2001

2a) This action is FINAL. 2b) This action is non-final.

3) Since this application is in condition for allowance except for formal matters, prosecution as to the merits is closed in accordance with the practice under *Ex parte Quayle* 835 C.D. 11; 453 O.G. 213.

Disposition of Claims

4) Claim(s) 1-5, 7-12, 14, 16-18, 20, and 21 is/are pending in the applica

4a) Of the above, claim(s) _____ is/are withdrawn from considera

5) Claim(s) _____ is/are allowed.

6) Claim(s) 1-5, 7-12, 14, 16-18, 20, and 21 is/are rejected.

7) Claim(s) _____ is/are objected to.

8) Claims _____ are subject to restriction and/or election requirem

Application Papers

9) The specification is objected to by the Examiner.

10) The drawing(s) filed on Feb 7, 2001 is/are objected to by the Examiner.

11) The proposed drawing correction filed on Sep 24, 2001 is: a) approved b) disapproved.

12) The oath or declaration is objected to by the Examiner.

Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119

13) Acknowledgement is made of a claim for foreign priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(a)-(d).

a) All b) Some* c) None of:

1. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received.

2. Certified copies of the priority documents have been received in Application No. _____.

3. Copies of the certified copies of the priority documents have been received in this National Stage application from the International Bureau (PCT Rule 17.2(a)).

*See the attached detailed Office action for a list of the certified copies not received.

14) Acknowledgement is made of a claim for domestic priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e).

Attachment(s)

15) Notice of References Cited (PTO-892) 18) Interview Summary (PTO-413) Paper No(s). _____

16) Notice of Draftsperson's Patent Drawing Review (PTO-948) 19) Notice of Informal Patent Application (PTO-152)

17) Information Disclosure Statement(s) (PTO-1449) Paper No(s). _____ 20) Other: _____

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DETAILED ACTION

Oath/Declaration

1. The oath or declaration is defective. A new oath or declaration in compliance with 37 CFR 1.67(a) identifying this application by application number and filing date is required. See MPEP §§ 602.01 and 602.02.

The oath or declaration is defective because:

Non-initialed and/or non-dated alterations have been made to the oath or declaration. See 37 CFR 1.52(c).

In addition, it should be noted that the dates of the signatures of all of the applicants has been partially cutout of the copies received.

In response to the applicants request for a copy of the defective declaration, a copy has been hereto attached.

Drawings

2. The drawings are objected to because in Figure 5 there are some lines which are unclear. Since the applicant has admitted that these lines form no part of the claimed invention, perhaps these lines should be removed. Correction is required.

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3. Applicant is required to submit a proposed drawing correction in reply to this Office action. However, formal correction of the noted defect can be deferred until the application is allowed by the examiner.

Specification

4. The disclosure is objected to because of the following informalities:

✓ On page 1, line 4 of [0004], "to be" should be deleted.

✓ On page 3, line 4 of [0018], the "12" after "sedan type automotive vehicle" should be deleted.

✓ On page 6, line 5 of [0027], "on adjacent" is awkward and only one word should be used. Also on page 6, line 8 of [0027], "bottom 26" should be "bottom 36" and on line 11, "drawer 60" should be "drawer 34". Appropriate correction is required.

✓ 5. The abstract of the disclosure is objected to because on line 1, "20An" should perhaps just be "An". Correction is required. See MPEP § 608.01(b).

6. A copy of the specification has been hereto attached for the applicant.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 112

7. The following is a quotation of the second paragraph of 35 U.S.C. 112:

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The specification shall conclude with one or more claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which the applicant regards as his invention.

8. Claim 7 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite for failing to particularly point out and distinctly claim the subject matter which applicant regards as the invention.

✓ In addition on line 7 the claim recites "a load floor" operatively cooperating ^{with} the rails. This ~~OK~~ is unclear however, since the sides of the load floor assembly appear to cooperate with the rails and not a load floor. Furthermore if the load floor cooperated with the rails, then perhaps the rails should be located on or near the floor which they are not. The rails (seen in the figures) are located on the sides of the load floor assembly.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 102

9. The following is a quotation of the appropriate paragraphs of 35 U.S.C. 102 that form the basis for the rejections under this section made in this Office action:

A person shall be entitled to a patent unless --

(b) the invention was patented or described in a printed publication in this or a foreign country or in public use or on sale in this country, more than one year prior to the date of application for patent in the United States.

10. Claims 8-12 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Webber.

Webber discloses an integrated extendable load floor assembly for a vehicle having a rear storage area 18 with a longitudinal open end comprising: at least one rail 14, 34 adapted to be disposed upon the a side of the rear storage area; a load floor 40 (Figure 3) cooperating with the

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at least one rail allowing for a selective sliding movement in and out of the rear storage area of the vehicle and to close the longitudinal open end of the rear storage area; and a load floor latching mechanism 100 (Figures 2 and 6) that latches the load floor in a closed position within the rear storage area, the load floor latching mechanism including a movable handle 104 disposed on the load floor.

Webber also includes at least one slide 46, 48 disposed on sides of the load floor and cooperating with a portion of the at least one rail. The load floor comprises a bottom and sides extending generally perpendicular to the bottom to form a compartment for holding objects. A rear panel 50 is cooperatively attached to a bottom of a rear edge of the load floor allowing selective positioning of the rear panel in an upright closed position and a lower horizontal open position. A rear panel latching mechanism 80 (Figure 5) latches the rear panel in the upright closed position.

11. Claim 20 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Mayer.

Mayer discloses an automotive vehicle 10 comprising: a body including a rear end having a floor 14 and sides 16, 18 extending upwardly and along the floor to form a cargo area; a plurality of rails spaced 44 laterally and extending longitudinally between the sides 16, 18 above the floor 14; a load floor 20 operatively cooperating with the rails for sliding movement therealong; and a decklid 32, 34 pivotally secured to the sides to cover the cargo area in a closed position and to allow access to the cargo area in an open position and to allow the load floor to be

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extended when the decklid is in the open position; an endgate 22 pivotally connected to the load floor and having a closed upright position and an open horizontal position; an endgate latching mechanism 84 that latches the endgate in the upright closed position; and a load floor latching mechanism 66, 78 that latches the load floor in a closed position within the rear storage area.

12. Claim 21 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 102(b) as being anticipated by Mayer.

Mayer discloses a sedan type automotive vehicle comprising: a body (Figure 1) including a rear end 10 having a floor 14 and sides 16 and 18 extending upwardly and along the floor to form a cargo area 12; a load floor 20 for sliding movement in and out of the cargo area; an endgate 22 pivotally connected to the load floor 20 and having a closed upright position and an open horizontal position; a decklid 32 and 34 pivotally secured to the sides and cooperating with the endgate to cover the cargo area in a closed position and to allow access to the cargo area in an open position and to allow objects to be removed from the cargo area when the decklid is in the open position; and a load floor latching mechanism 66 that latches the load floor in a closed position within the cargo area.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

13. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are

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such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

This application currently names joint inventors. In considering patentability of the claims under 35 U.S.C. 103(a), the examiner presumes that the subject matter of the various claims was commonly owned at the time any inventions covered therein were made absent any evidence to the contrary. Applicant is advised of the obligation under 37 CFR 1.56 to point out the inventor and invention dates of each claim that was not commonly owned at the time a later invention was made in order for the examiner to consider the applicability of 35 U.S.C. 103(c) and potential 35 U.S.C. 102(f) or (g) prior art under 35 U.S.C. 103(a).

14. Claims 1-5 and 7 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Webber in view of Kepley et al. and Riley.

Webber discloses an integrated extendable load floor assembly for a vehicle having a rear end with a floor 18 and sides 16 extending upwardly and along the floor to form a cargo area. The integrated extendable load floor assembly comprises: a plurality of rails 14, 34 (Figure 4) adapted to be disposed upon the sides 16 above the floor of the rear end; a load floor 40 (seen in Figure 3) operatively cooperating with the rails for sliding movement therealong and to close a longitudinal end of the cargo area; and a load floor latching mechanism 100 (Figures 2 and 6) that latches the load floor in a closed position within the cargo area.

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Webber also discloses a pair of slides 46, 48 disposed on opposed sides of the load floor and cooperating with the rails. The load floor comprises a bottom 40 and sides 44 extending generally perpendicular to the bottom to form a compartment for holding objects. An endgate 50 is pivotally attached to a rear longitudinal end of the load floor having an upright closed position and a horizontal open position. A latching mechanism 80 (Figure 5) latches the endgate to the load floor in the upright closed position.

Webber lacks the assembly comprising a decklid for closing an upper portion of the cargo area.

Kepley et al. disclose a vehicle such as a pick-up truck having a truck cover or "decklid" (seen in the figures). The decklid can be used to close an upper portion of a cargo area. These types of decklids are well known in the art and are commonly used on conventional pickup trucks.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to have placed a decklid as taught by Kepley et al. upon the vehicle of Webber in order to cover the cargo area and help protect objects therein.

Webber, as modified, lacks the load floor including an inner panel pivotally attached thereto to pivot between a closed position and an open position relative to a bottom thereof.

Riley teaches an endgate 20 having an inner panel 40 (as seen in the figures).

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to have used the endgate as taught by Riley in place of the endgate of Webber, as modified, in order to provide the vehicle with an easily accessible storage compartment.

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15. Claims 14 and 16-18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Webber in view of Kepley et al.

Webber discloses a vehicle comprising: a body 18 including a rear end having a floor and sides 16 extending upwardly and along the floor to form a rear storage area having a longitudinal open end; and an integrated extendable load floor assembly cooperating with the rear storage area, the integrated extendable load floor assembly including at least one rail 14, 34 (Figure 4) disposed upon each of the sides of the rear storage area and a load floor 40 (Figure 3) cooperating with the at least one rail, the load floor having selective sliding movement in and out of the rear storage area of the vehicle and to close the open end of the rear storage area and a load floor latching mechanism 100 (Figures 2 and 6) that latches the load floor in a closed position within the rear storage area.

The load floor 40 comprises a bottom 42 and sides 44 extending generally perpendicular to the bottom to form a compartment for holding objects. A rear panel 50 is cooperatively attached to a bottom of a rear edge of the load floor allowing selective positioning of the rear panel in an upright closed position and a horizontal open position (Figures 1-3 and 5). A rear panel latching mechanism 80 (seen in Figure 5) latches the rear panel in the upright closed position.

Webber lacks a decklid pivotally secured to the rear end to cover the rear storage area in a closed position and to allow access to the rear storage area in an open position.

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Kepley et al. disclose a vehicle such as a pick-up truck having a truck cover or "decklid" (seen in the figures). The decklid can be used to close an upper portion of a cargo area. These types of decklids are well known in the art and are commonly used on conventional pickup trucks.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to have placed a decklid as taught by Kepley et al. upon the vehicle of Webber in order to cover the cargo area and help protect objects therein.

16. Claims 14 and 16-18 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Greig in view of Powell.

Greig discloses a vehicle comprising: a body including a rear end having a floor and sides extending upwardly and along the floor to form a rear storage area 11 having a longitudinal open end; a decklid 13 pivotally secured to the rear end to cover the rear storage area 11 in a closed position and to allow access to the rear storage area in an open position; and an integrated extendable load floor assembly cooperating with the rear storage area. The integrated extendable load floor assembly includes at least one rail 20 adapted to be disposed generally at the sides of the rear storage area and a load floor 23 cooperating with the at least one rail, via trackways 31. The load floor 23 has selective sliding movement in and out of the rear storage area of the vehicle. The sliding movement allows for closure of the open end of the rear storage area. In addition, the integrated load floor assembly includes a load floor latching mechanism, generally 45, that latches the load floor in a closed position within the rear storage area.

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The load floor 23 comprises a bottom 24 and sides 25 extending generally perpendicular to the bottom to form a compartment for holding objects. Furthermore, the assembly includes a rear panel or endgate 26 that is cooperatively attached to a bottom of a rear edge of the load floor allowing selective positioning of the rear panel in an upright closed position and a horizontal open position. A rear panel latching mechanism 28 is also provided to latch the rear panel in the upright closed position.

Greig lacks the at least one rail being disposed upon each of the sides of the rear storage area.

Powell discloses a vehicle comprising: a body including a rear end having a floor and sides extending upwardly and along the floor to form a rear storage area 12 having a longitudinal open end; a decklid 16 pivotally secured to the rear end to cover the rear storage area 12 in a closed position and to allow access to the rear storage area in an open position; and an integrated extendable load floor assembly cooperating with the rear storage area. The integrated extendable load floor assembly includes at least one rail 32 being disposed upon each of the sides of the rear storage area and a load floor 20 cooperating with the at least one rail, via rack bars 33. The load floor 20 has selective sliding movement in and out of the rear storage area of the vehicle. The sliding movement allows for closure of the open end of the rear storage area.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time the invention was made to have placed the at least one rail of Greig upon the sides of the rear storage area as taught by Powell as an obvious expedient.

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Response to Arguments

17. Applicant's arguments with respect to claims 1-5, 7-12, 14, 16-18, and 20-21 have been considered but are moot in view of the new ground(s) of rejection. However, with regard to some arguments the examiner has set forth a response below.

With regard to the argument that Mayer does not disclose at least one rail disposed upon a side of the rear storage area, the examiner agrees and has withdrawn some of the previous rejections set forth in the last office action. However, the examiner feels that this limitation of placing the at least one rail along the sides of the rear storage area in place of the floor could be easily taught by Greig or Powell and is an obvious expedient to the structure of Mayer.

Applicant also states that Mayer lacks a load floor latching mechanism that latches the load floor in a closed position within the cargo area. The examiner disagrees and feels that Mayer does indeed disclose this feature of the claimed invention. Specifically Mayer discloses a load floor latching mechanism 66 that latches the load floor in a closed position.

With respect to the argument that Webber does not disclose a load floor latching mechanism that latches a load floor in a closed position within a rear storage area and includes a movable handle disposed on the load floor, the examiner disagrees and feels that Webber does adequately disclose this feature of the claimed invention. Specifically Webber discloses a load floor latching mechanism, generally 100, (best seen in Figures 2 and 6) that is capable of latching a load floor in various positions along a slot 48, including a closed position within a rear storage area. In addition, Webber discloses the load floor latching mechanism 100 including a movable

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handle 104 which is disposed on the load floor (Figure 6) and can be screwed and tightened to lock the load floor in one position, such as a closed position, and loosened to allow the load floor to move to another position within the slot.

Furthermore, it should be noted that the Kepley et al. and Riley references are used only as teaching references and do not include nor need include all of the limitations of the claimed invention.

Conclusion

18. The prior art made of record and not relied upon is considered pertinent to applicant's disclosure. The cited references show other load floor assemblies similar to that of the current invention.
19. Applicant's amendment necessitated the new ground(s) of rejection presented in this Office action. Accordingly, **THIS ACTION IS MADE FINAL**. See MPEP § 706.07(a). Applicant is reminded of the extension of time policy as set forth in 37 CFR 1.136(a).

A shortened statutory period for reply to this final action is set to expire **THREE** MONTHS from the mailing date of this action. In the event a first reply is filed within **TWO** MONTHS of the mailing date of this final action and the advisory action is not mailed until after the end of the **THREE-MONTH** shortened statutory period, then the shortened statutory period will expire on the date the advisory action is mailed, and any extension fee pursuant to 37

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CFR 1.136(a) will be calculated from the mailing date of the advisory action. In no event, however, will the statutory period for reply expire later than SIX MONTHS from the date of this final action.

20. Any inquiry concerning this communication from the examiner should be directed to Hilary L. Gutman whose telephone number is (703) 305-0496.

21. **Any response to this final action should be mailed to:**

Box AF

Assistant Commissioner for Patents

Washington, D.C. 20231

or faxed to:

(703)305-3597, (for formal communications; please mark "EXPEDITED PROCEDURE")

or:

(703)308-3297, (for informal or draft communications, please clearly label "PROPOSED" or "DRAFT").

hlg

October 15, 2001


10/15/01
STEPHEN T. GORDON
PRIMARY EXAMINER

SPECIFICATION

Electronic Version 1.2.8

Stylesheet Version 1.0

[**INTEGRATED EXTENDABLE LOAD FLOOR ASSEMBLY FOR VEHICLES**]

Background of Invention

[0001] The present invention relates generally to vehicles and, more specifically, to an integrated extendable load floor assembly for a vehicle.

[0002] It is known to provide a rear end for a vehicle such as a sedan type automotive vehicle. Typically, the vehicle body has a rear end with a cargo or trunk area and is closed at an upper portion thereof by a trunk lid or decklid. The decklid is hinged to the body of the vehicle to have an up or open position to open the cargo area and a down or closed position to close the cargo area.

[0003] It is desirable to expand a carrying capability of the cargo area in a conventional sedan type automotive vehicle without compromising an exterior appearance of the vehicle. It is also desirable to provide an extendable load floor assembly for a sedan type automotive vehicle to aid in carrying large or oversize objects. It is further desirable to provide an extendable load floor assembly that is integrated with a rear end of a vehicle.

Summary of Invention

[0004] Accordingly, the present invention is an integrated extendable load floor assembly for a vehicle having a rear end with a floor and sides extending upwardly and along the floor to form a cargo area and a decklid for closing an upper portion of the cargo area. The integrated extendable load floor assembly includes a plurality of rails adapted to be disposed upon the sides above the floor of the

rear end. The integrated extendable load floor assembly also includes a load floor operatively cooperating with the rails for sliding movement therealong and to close a longitudinal end of the cargo area.

[0005] One advantage of the present invention is that an integrated extendable load floor assembly is provided for a vehicle such as a sedan type automotive vehicle. Another advantage of the present invention is that the integrated extendable load floor assembly provides expanded carrying capability of the cargo area in a conventional sedan type automotive vehicle without compromising the exterior appearance of the vehicle and integrated with the rear end of the vehicle. Yet another advantage of the present invention is that the integrated extendable load floor assembly allows the cargo area to expand to carry long or tall items that previously could not be accommodated in a conventional sedan type automotive vehicle. Still another advantage of the present invention is that the integrated extendable load floor assembly has a decklid that minimizes the lift over height required to load items in the cargo area of the rear end of the vehicle.

[0006] Other features and advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated, as the same becomes better understood, after reading the subsequent description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of Drawings

[0007] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an integrated extendable load floor assembly, according to the present invention, illustrated in operational relationship with a vehicle.

[0008] FIG. 2 is a view similar to FIG. 1 of the integrated extendable load floor assembly illustrated in an open position.

[0009] FIG. 3 is a side elevational view of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 1 illustrated in an open position.

[0010] FIG. 4 is an enlarged perspective view of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 3 illustrating an endgate in an open position.

[0011] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a portion of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 1.

[0012] FIG. 6 is an enlarged perspective view of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 3 illustrating an inner panel of a floor in an open position.

[0013] FIG. 7 is an enlarged perspective view of a portion of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 6 illustrating the endgate in an open position.

[0014] FIG. 8 is an enlarged elevational view of a portion of the endgate of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 3.

[0015] FIG. 9 is an enlarged perspective view of a portion of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 3.

[0016] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 3 illustrating an inner panel of an endgate in an open position.

[0017] FIG. 11 is a perspective view of the integrated extendable load floor assembly of FIG. 3 illustrating the endgate in an open position with an optional endgate extender.

Detailed Description

[0018] Referring now to the drawings and in particular FIGS. 1 and 2, one embodiment of an integrated extendable load floor assembly 10, according to the present invention, is illustrated in connection with a vehicle, generally indicated at 12, such as a sedan type automotive vehicle 12. Such vehicles 12 typically include a body 14 having a rear end 16 forming a storage or cargo area 18. The rear end 16 includes a front 19, floor 20 (FIG. 5), two sides 22 and a rear decklid 24, which define the cargo area 18. The vehicle 12 also includes the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 disposed in and closing a longitudinal end of the cargo area 18. It should be appreciated that the decklid 24 may be removable. It should also be appreciated that, except for the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10, the vehicle 12 is conventional and known in the art.

[0019] Referring to FIGS. 2 through 6, the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 includes a plurality of, preferably a pair of rails, generally indicated at 26, spaced laterally and extending longitudinally between the sides 22 above the floor 20 of the rear end 16. Each of the rails 26 has a first rail member 28 extending longitudinally and at least one first bracket member 30 for attaching the first rail member 28 to the sides 22. The first rail member 28 is attached to the first bracket member 30 by suitable means such as fasteners (not shown) or welding and the first bracket member 30 is attached to the sides 22 by suitable means such as fasteners (not shown) or welding. It should be appreciated that the first rail member 28 is stationary relative to the body 14 of the vehicle 12.

[0020] Each of the rails 26 has a second rail member 32 slidably connected to the first rail member 28. The second rail member 32 cooperates with the first rail member 28 to allow at least a portion of the second rail member 32 to extend beyond the first rail member 28 for a function to be described. The rails 26 may each include a stop member (not shown) attached to either one of the first rail member 28 or second rail member 32 to limit the longitudinal extension of the second rail member 32 relative to the first rail member 28. The rails 26 are made of a rigid material such as metal. It should be appreciated that the rails 26 are conventional and known in the art.

[0021] Referring to FIGS. 2 through 10, the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 also includes at least one drawer or load floor, generally indicated at 34, for cooperating with the rails 26. The load floor 34 has a bottom 36 and opposed sides 38 extending generally perpendicular to the bottom 36 to form a cavity or chamber 40 therein with open longitudinal ends. The load floor 34 is generally rectangular in shape. The load floor 34 is made of a rigid material such as metal. It should be appreciated that the load floor 34 is used to hold objects or cargo such as luggage therein.

[0022] The load floor 34 may include an inner panel 41 that is pivotally connected to a forward interior end thereof by suitable means such as a hinge (not shown) and movable relative thereto to allow access to a spare tire (not shown) to be stored

within a recess (not shown) of the floor 20 of the rear end 16 as illustrated in FIG. 6. The inner panel 41 may include a latch mechanism (not shown) on the inner panel 41 to releasably secure the inner panel 41 to the bottom 36 of the load floor 34.

[0023] The load floor 34 also includes a slide 42 disposed on and attached to the sides 38 thereof. The slides 42 extend longitudinally and cooperate with the second rail member 32 of the rails 26 for sliding therealong. The load floor 34 may include a stop member (not shown) attached to either one of the slide 42 or second rail member 32 to limit the longitudinal extension of the slide 42 relative to the second rail member 32. The slide 42 is attached to the side 38 of the load floor 34 by suitable means such as fasteners (not shown) or welding. It should be appreciated that the slide 42 is conventional and known in the art. It should also be appreciated that the slide 42 is stationary relative to the load floor 34, but is movable relative to the second rail member 32, first rail member 28, and body 14 of the vehicle 12.

[0024] The integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 also includes a rear panel or endgate 44 to close a rear longitudinal open end of the load floor 34. The endgate 44 is generally rectangular in shape. The endgate 44 is pivotally connected to the sides 38 of the load floor 34 by suitable means such as a pivot pin 46 at a lower end thereof. The endgate 44 is also connected to the sides 38 of the load floor 34 by suitable means such as a cable 48 at an upper end thereof. It should be appreciated that the endgate 44 has an upper latch mechanism (not shown) to cooperate with the decklid 24 for releasably latching the decklid 24 to the endgate 44 when the endgate 44 is in a closed upright position.

[0025] The integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 includes a latch mechanism, generally indicated at 49, to latch the endgate 44 in a closed position relative to the load floor 34. The latch mechanism 49 has a striker 50 on each lateral side of the endgate 44 and a latch 52 on each lateral side 38 of the drawer 34 for engaging and disengaging the striker 50. The latch mechanism 49 also includes a movable handle 54 for actuating the latch 52 to release the striker 50 to move the

endgate 44 from a closed and generally vertical position to an open and generally horizontal position. It should be appreciated that the pivot pin 46, striker 50, and latch 52 are conventional and known in the art.

[0026] The endgate 44 may include an inner panel 56 that is pivotally connected to a lower interior end thereof by suitable means such as a hinge (not shown) and movable relative thereto to allow objects (not shown) to be stored within an interior cavity 58 of the endgate 44 as illustrated in FIG. 10. The endgate 44 may include a latch mechanism 60 on the inner panel 54 to releasably secure the inner panel 56 to the endgate 44.

[0027] As illustrated in FIGS. 8 and 9, the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 includes a latch mechanism, generally indicated at 62, to latch the drawer 34 in a closed position relative to the rear end 16 of the vehicle 12. The latch mechanism 62 includes a striker 64 attached by suitable means such as a bracket 66 to a rear bumper 68 on adjacent the floor 20 of the rear end 16. The bracket 66 is attached to the rear bumper 68 by suitable means such as fasteners 67 or welding. The latch mechanism 62 also includes a latch 70 attached by suitable means such as fasteners (not shown) to a forward longitudinal end 72 of the bottom 26 of the drawer 34 for engaging and disengaging the striker 64. The latch mechanism 62 includes a movable handle 74 for actuating the latch 70 to release the striker 64 to move the drawer 60 from a closed position adjacent to the rear end 16 of the vehicle 12 to an open position spaced longitudinally away from the rear end 16 of the vehicle 12. It should be appreciated that the striker 64 and latch 70 are conventional and known in the art.

[0028] Referring to FIG. 11, the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 may include an endgate extender 76 attached to the sides 38 of the load floor 34. The endgate extender 76 has a plurality of tubes 78 spaced vertically and extending laterally and interconnected by a plurality of straps 80 extending vertically and spaced laterally. The endgate extender 76 is disposed on the endgate 44 when the endgate 44 is in the open position and connected to the sides 38 of the load floor 34 by suitable means such as fasteners (not shown). It should be appreciated that

the drawer 34 is in the closed position and the endgate 44 is in the open position when the endgate extender 76 is attached to the load floor 34. It should also be appreciated that the endgate extender 76 is optional.

[0029] In another embodiment, the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10 may eliminate the extendable load floor 34 and have the endgate 44 pivotally connected to the sides 22 of the rear end 16. In this embodiment, the endgate 44 includes the latch mechanism 49 to latch the endgate 44 in a closed upright position relative to the sides 22 of the rear end 16 and an upper latch mechanism (not shown) to cooperate with the decklid 24 for releasably latching the decklid 24 to the endgate 44 when the endgate 44 is in a closed upright position. It should be appreciated that this embodiment would look similar to that illustrated in FIG. 11 and may include the endgate extender 76.

[0030] In operation of the integrated extendable load floor assembly 10, during normal operating conditions, the load floor 34 is in a closed position with the rear end 16 to close the longitudinal end of the cargo area 18 of the rear end 16 as illustrated in FIG. 1. The load floor 34 is used to hold objects in the cargo area 18 of the rear end 16. In addition, the decklid 24 is in a closed position with the rear end 16 to close an upper portion of the cargo area 18.

[0031] If desirable, the upper latch mechanism (not shown) may be actuated via a handle (not shown) to allow the decklid 24 to move from a closed position with the rear end 16 to an open position with the rear end 16 as illustrated in FIG. 2. At this point, cargo may be unloaded from the load floor 34 by an operator (not shown) in a conventional manner. If desired, the operator via the handle 74 may actuate the latch mechanism 62, and the load floor 34 may be slid rearward an open position with the rear end 16 as illustrated in FIG. 2 to allow the operator to unload the cargo from the load floor 34. It should be appreciated that the endgate 44 is in a closed position relative to the load floor 34.

[0032] If desirable, the latch mechanism 49 may be actuated via the handle 54 to allow the endgate 44 to move from a closed position with the drawer 34 to an open position with the drawer 34 as illustrated in FIG. 4. At this point, cargo may be

unloaded from the load floor 34. If desired, the latch mechanism 60 may be actuated by the operator and the inner panel 56 of the endgate 44 moved upward to an open position with the endgate 44 as illustrated in FIG. 10 to allow the operator to unload the cargo from the cavity 58 of the endgate 44. If desired, the latch mechanism (not shown) may be actuated by the operator and the inner panel 41 of the load floor 34 moved upward to an open position with the bottom 36 of the load floor 34 as illustrated in FIG. 6 to allow the operator access to the spare tire (not shown) in the recess (not shown) of the floor 20 of the rear end 16. It should be appreciated that the endgate 44 is in an open position relative to the load floor 34.

[0033] The present invention has been described in an illustrative manner. It is to be understood that the terminology, which has been used, is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation.

[0034] Many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. Therefore, within the scope of the appended claims, the present invention may be practiced other than as specifically described.

[INTEGRATED EXTENDABLE LOAD FLOOR ASSEMBLY FOR VEHICLES]

Abstract of Disclosure

20An integrated extendable load floor assembly is provided for a vehicle having a rear end with a floor and sides extending upwardly and along the floor to form a cargo area and a decklid for closing an upper portion of the cargo area. The integrated extendable load floor assembly includes a plurality of rails adapted to be disposed upon the sides above the floor of the rear end. The integrated drawer assembly also includes a load floor operatively cooperating with the rails for sliding movement therealong and to close a longitudinal end of the cargo area.

DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY - ORIGINAL APPLICATION**Attorney's Docket No.
200-0729**

As a below named inventor, I hereby declare:

My residence, post office address and citizenship are as stated below next to my name:

I verily believe I am the original, first and sole inventor or an original, first and joint inventor of the subject matter that is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

INTEGRATED EXTENDABLE LOAD FLOOR ASSEMBLY FOR VEHICLES

the specification of which is attached hereto.

I have reviewed and understand the contents of the specification identified above, including the claims.

I acknowledge my duty to disclose information of which I am aware that is material to the examination of this application in accordance with Section 1.56(a), Title 37 of the Code of Federal Regulations; and as to application for patents or inventor's certificate on the invention filed in any country foreign to the United States of America, prior to this application by me or my legal representatives or assigns,

no such applications have been filed, or

such applications have been filed as follows

COUNTRY	APPLICATION NO.	DATE OF FILING (month, day, year)	DATE OF ISSUE (month, day, year)	PRIORITY CLAIMED UNDER 35 USC 119

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of any United States provisional application(s) listed below.

APPLICATION NUMBER(S)	FILING DATE (month, day, year)	<input type="checkbox"/> Additional provisional application numbers are listed on a supplemental priority data sheet PTO/SB/02B attached hereto.

I hereby claim the benefit under 35 U.S.C. § 120 of any United States application(s) or § 365(c) of any PCT International application designating the United States, listed below and, insofar as the subject matter of each of the claims of this application is not disclosed in the prior United States or PCT International application in the manner provided by the first paragraph of 35 U.S.C. § 112, I acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37 CFR § 1.56 which became available between the filing date of the prior application and the national or PCT International filing date of this application.

(Application Number) (Filing Date) (Status - patented, pending, abandoned)

(Application Number) (Filing Date) (Status - patented, pending, abandoned)

POWER OF ATTORNEY: As a named inventor, I hereby appoint the following attorney(s) and/or agent(s) to prosecute this application and transact all business in the United States Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith and to act on my behalf before the competent International Authorities in connection with any and all international applications filed by me.

(List name and registration number)

Daniel H. Bliss - 32,398

Gigette M. Bejin - 44,027

Raymond L. Coppellie - 33,311

Roger L. May - 26,406

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Address all correspondence and telephone calls to:

Daniel H. Bliss
 Bliss McGlynn P.C.
 2075 West Big Beaver Road Suite 600
 Troy, MI 48084 Phone: 248 - 649-6090

I hereby declare that all statements made herein of my own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like so made are punishable by fine or imprisonment, or both, under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code, and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS OF INVENTOR:	RESIDENCE	CITIZENSHIP	SIGNATURE	DATE
Joseph John Melotik PO Box 7505 Dearborn, Michigan 48121 US	Dearborn, Michigan 48121 US	U.S.A		
Jerry Edward Pack 10553 Splitstone Pinckney, MI 48169 US	Pinckney, MI 48169 US	U.S.A	<i>Jerry E. Pack</i>	1/2/2
Makonnen W. Eyob 44991 Middlebury Ct. Canton, MI 48188 US	Canton, MI 48188 US	U.S.A		
Maria Glavanovich 42682 Reddlem Canton, MI 48187 US	Canton, MI 48187 US	U.S.A		
William Francis McAtamney 6632 Glenshaw Ct. West Bloomfield, MI 48322 US	West Bloomfield, MI 48322 US	U.S.A		

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Daniel H. Bliss
 Bliss McGlynn P.C.
 2075 West Big Beaver Road Suite 600
 Troy, MI 48084 Phone: 248 - 649-6090

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Joseph John Melotik PO Box 7505 Dearborn, Michigan 48121 US	Dearborn, Michigan 48121 US	U.S.A	_____	_____
Jerry Edward Pack 10553 Splitstone Pinckney, MI 48169 US	Pinckney, MI 48169 US	U.S.A	_____	_____
Makonnen W. Eyob 44991 Middlebury Ct. Canton, MI 48188 US	Canton, MI 48188 US	U.S.A	<u>Makonnen Eyob</u>	01/02/
Maria Glavanovich 42682 Redfern Canton, MI 48187 US	Canton, MI 48187 US	U.S.A	_____	_____
William Francis McAtamney 6632 Glenshaw Ct. West Bloomfield, MI 48322 US	West Bloomfield, MI 48322 US	U.S.A	_____	_____

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NAME AND MAILING ADDRESS OF INVENTOR:	RESIDENCE	CITIZENSHIP	SIGNATURE	DATE
Joseph John Melotik PO Box 3086 Dearborn, Michigan 48126 US MELOTIK	14003 Townsite Dearborn, Michigan 48121 US	U.S.A		01-03-C
Jerry Edward Pack 10553 Splitstone Pinckney, MI 48169 US	Pinckney, MI 48169 US	U.S.A	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Makonnen W. Eyob 44991 Middlebury Ct. Canton, MI 48188 US	Canton, MI 48188 US	U.S.A	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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2075 West Big Beaver Road Suite 600
Troy, MI 48084 Phone: 248 - 649-6090

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Maria Glavanovich 42682 Redfern Canton, MI 48187 US	Canton, MI 48187 US	U.S.A	Maria Glavanovich	1/2/0
William Francis McAtamney 6632 Glenshaw Ct. West Bloomfield, MI 48322 US	West Bloomfield, MI 48322 US	U.S.A	William Francis McAtamney	1/2/0